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WE

Following is a brief summary of the attached report from our country team in Bogota concerning the Colombia violence problem:

There is much contradiction, exaggeration, and distortion, especially in press reporting, of the violence problem in Colombia. Calling the bandit bands "guerrillas" is misleading. Present violence is confined to a relatively small, although important, part of the country, and is essentially criminal banditry. It is not guerrilla warfare in the classical sense, it is not insurrectional; it is essentially criminal.

The violence problem, which reached its peak during the 1948-53 period, is the result of and part of historical, political, social and economic factors. Motivations of the bandits involve some or all of the following: economic (a means of earning a living); political (desire for a "war-lord" type of control); social (sheer criminality).

There is little coordination among bandit bands; rivals and jealousies constitute built-in barriers.

Only a very small amount of current banditry is traceable to subversive, communist, or political motivation. To describe it as Communist or Castroist is simplistic.

The danger is that subversive forces might capture the para-military capability of a band or bands and use it to break down public order and unleash destruction to the point of bringing the government down. This danger is more real than the initiation of a straightforward guerrilla rebellion.

The banditry problem is manageable in its present form and could be reduced to tolerable levels quickly if the government undertakes determined efforts.

Colombian violence can be considered active, as typified by Caudrillas, or bandit bands, or potential, as typified by ex-guerrilla Caudillos which have a para-military capability not now being used.

ILLEGIB

Strength of the Caudrillas and Caudillos is difficult to estimate, but is probably something like this:

State Dept. review completed

Caudrillas

Active: 75 bands totaling 997 personnel  
Inactive: 65 bands totaling 1,127 personnel

Caudillos

Inactive: 29 bands totaling 4,360 personnel